



CUMMINGS' GOINGS

with broadcaster, author and man-about-Gloucestershire **Mark Cummings**



PHOTO: ALEKS GJIKI

Glorious Gloucestershire book cover

Image problem

Which one simple image sums up Gloucestershire? What depiction reflects the beauty, majesty and utter magic of this incredible county? This question has been pervading my every thought for a couple of months, driving me to utter distraction as I searched for the Holy Grail. I Googled Gloucestershire images as if my life depended on it, searched thousands of photos on local camera club websites, leafed through glossy magazines and tourist websites until eventually I found exactly what I'd been looking for. The location for my epiphany was the sedate upper floor of Waterstones

in Cheltenham. I was flicking through the mesmerising *Gloucestershire in Photographs* book by Aleks Gjika when it happened.

The euphoric noise I made could be heard clearly in the bookshop café a few feet away, I was slightly taken aback when a jolly middle-aged woman winked at her companion and said: 'I'll have what he's having.' My quest was to find the front cover for my book, *Glorious Gloucestershire*, which will be published in September. The book is a celebration of all the unique, surprising and joyful elements that make the county so special. It's my love letter about my favourite place in the whole world so I wanted to get the cover image right. At

first, I imagined a collage of images such as the River Severn, Gloucester Cathedral, the Stroud Valleys, Cheltenham Cricket Festival, rolling Cotswold hills etc. My publishers quite rightly told me this doesn't work for a front cover so I went in search of one simple image that would melt the heart of the potential purchaser. The photo Aleks took from the top of Coaley Peak has the perfect mixture of yellows, oranges and greens, it includes the Forest, the Severn, The Vale and the Cotswolds and has a smile at the bottom thanks to Frocester Hill. If the cheeky woman from the Waterstones café is reading this, get in touch and I'll send you a signed copy.



Bruce Springsteen at Cardiff's Principality Stadium

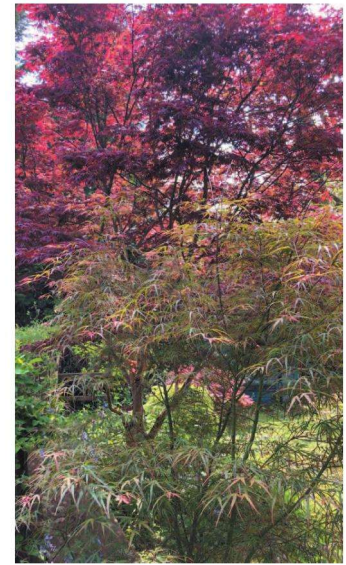
PHOTOS: MARK CUMMINGS

INVEST IN AN ACER

My mate, Kev, is an expert gardener and also acts as a look out for me. I check my phone regularly in case he's spotted some great value Japanese maples outside Aldi or Morrisons.

I then speed off and gather my latest bounty of £9 bargains. Twenty years ago, I decided I'd cultivate an acer glade and I have 23 scattered across my patio, lawn and wild flower garden. I know each tree individually, where I got them from, how much they cost and when I planted them.

They were all bought for under £20 and I love going around garden centres looking at the astronomical prices charged and comparing them with my collection back home. If you are prepared to invest two decades of nurturing and love the rewards are huge. Kev's texting again: 'What, three quid at Morrisons? I'm off...'



Acers in Mark's garden

The tale of two gigs

This is a study of great and not so great, expectations. I want to explore the huge contrast between a concert I went to at the Principality Stadium in Cardiff and one coming up at Westonbirt Arboretum.

In May I saw Bruce Springsteen for the first time and he was everything I was told he'd be. It was three hours of total commitment, power and joy performed by a legend who you could tell was loving every minute of connecting deeply with the packed stadium. As a total contrast, on Sunday, July 7, at

Westonbirt we will turn up to see another legend who appears to have completely the opposite approach.

This will be only the second time I've seen Van Morrison and I am quite happy to pay to see an artist who can be grumpy, disinterested and monosyllabic. If you go to one of his gigs expecting gags and crowd-surfing, it's not going to happen.

I know exactly what we will get and that's fine. His body of work is supreme and I'll savour every minute.

Festival fun in the sun... hopefully

When I think of the Cheltenham Cricket Festival the following images come to mind: The iconic backdrop of Cheltenham College, Jack Russell flogging his artwork, cream teas, white picket fences and rain.

Let me unpick some of this. Over the years the festival, for me, has been a mixture of work, rest and sometimes play.

I hosted my show when Jack Russell had his testimonial game with invited guests such as Wayne Larkins, Robin Smith and

Darren Gough. You will often find Jack in a small gazebo chatting to fans, selling his wonderful artwork whilst munching on his homemade sandwiches wrapped in tin foil.

I've had the luxury of a corporate invitation when the day revolves around food every two hours, non-stop top ups of wine and a bird's eye view of expert networking. I once saw a friend leap over the tiny white picket fences that border the different hospitality marquees. She came back half an hour later

with 20 business cards, two done deals and a bottle of Prosecco she'd nicked from the Eagle Tower tent. I'll conclude with this true story – a friend was driving home from the festival when a group of slightly tipsy middle-aged men staggered into the road in front of her. She slammed on the brakes as one chap fell onto her bonnet. Her anger turned to disbelief as the man staring back at her was a well-known local headmaster and also happened to be her dad. ●